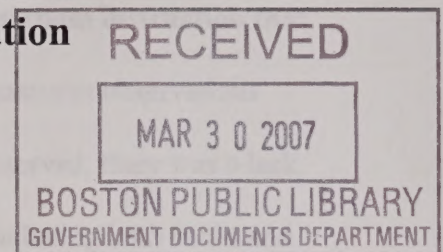




REPORT OF FACT FINDING REVIEW Massachusetts Department of Education

**The English High School
Boston Public Schools**



Executive Summary

During the Fact Finding Review at The English High School of the Boston Public Schools (BPS) conducted November 18 -26, 2002, the team concluded that the school has a number of deficiencies that have contributed to ongoing low student achievement in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics on state assessments. The team also determined that there are areas of strength and potential strength that could be instrumental in improving the level of student accomplishment. In examining the programs and practices at The English High School across all seven areas of inquiry, the team identified eleven key findings that affect the performance of students. The Team's findings are indicated below:

I. The intended Boston Public School (BPS) curriculum is academically sound and aligned with state Frameworks. Better monitoring is needed to ensure that the curriculum is properly implemented.

- BPS provides standards and programs that are aligned with state standards.
- Teachers use a variety of documents to plan daily lessons. The team found these to be generally in alignment with state standards.
- A number of district and building staff are responsible for the oversight of curriculum matters, but there is inadequate coordination of their efforts to promote a common view of effective curriculum implementation.

II. Although administrators frequently observe teacher performance in the majority of classrooms, the school is not systematically collecting data about classroom practice that can be used as part of improvement planning.

- The majority of classroom visits made by administrators are not consistently documented, leading to the loss of an important source of data on practices that directly impact student achievement.
- School leaders have only anecdotal and informal information on the quality of curriculum implementation on which to base decisions about program strengths and weaknesses.

GOV DOCS
LA
306
.B7M3322
2003x

III. The school is in the process of adopting instructional practices to improve student performance. There are multiple areas for improvement in classroom instruction that affect student performance.

- Higher expectations and more challenging classes: Of the 67 classroom observations conducted, over 50% were found not to be challenging.
- Inconsistent homework policy: Across the majority of classes observed, there was a lack of consequences for incomplete homework.
- Lack of probing questions: Good use of formative assessment, including both recall and questions that would require students to explain and expand on the topics being taught, was found in only 32 of 67 classroom visits.
- Acceptance of students' late arrivals to classes.
- Insufficient variety of instructional methodologies for the block schedule: The most dominant pedagogical style observed in 39 of 67 classroom visits was teacher-directed instruction. The second most dominant behavior was independent student work, often sheet work. This was noted in 32 of 67 observations. This instructional profile is unlikely to address the students' deficiencies in MCAS questions that require explanation and interpretation.

IV. To date, the school has not developed a system to document the impact of professional development activities on instruction and student performance.

- Recent professional development activities include content area meetings, Smaller Learning Communities meetings, BPS professional development workshops, and courses in Reader's and Writer's Workshop, Math Connections, block scheduling and instruction within the block, Teaching for Understanding, coaching, and self-determined professional development.
- The school is not collecting data on the effectiveness of these professional development activities.

V. The school has adopted an aggressive schedule to conduct formal evaluations of all teachers this year to improve instructional quality and to address serious past inconsistencies.

- A number of the school's experienced teachers have not had a formal evaluation in many years. Approximately one-third of the staff received a formal evaluation in 2000-2001. During 2001-2002, about one-fourth of all teachers received a formal evaluation.
- In contrast, to date this year, all of the school's provisional teachers were evaluated as required by the district prior to November 15 and plans are in place to evaluate all 93 teachers by the end of the school year. This represents a significant improvement in monitoring that begins to address the quality of instruction throughout the school.

VI. There are many individuals and groups in the school looking at student data for a variety of purposes. The school has not developed a systematic process that analyzes multiple measures of student performance in order to identify specific learning gaps.

- The Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), Headmaster, Teacher Leadership Team, Chief Academic Officer, and some groups of faculty have examined MCAS reports to identify general areas of student weakness.
- While the various findings are consistent in identifying concerns about student language skills, there has not been a parallel analysis of the variety of other available student assessments to corroborate or expand the school's understanding of its students' learning needs.
- While all of the above activities are positive, they are not coordinated so that the school benefits from a coherent review of multiple sources of student performance data that can be used to determine if curriculum programs and instructional practices are effectively serving English High School students.

VII. The school has completed the beginnings of an improvement plan. Progress to date includes spring 2002 brainstorming and the initial identification of needs, MCAS review by administrators and a small group of teachers, and a recent professional development day that engaged the entire faculty in looking at MCAS results. However, no review of school practices and their impact on or linkage to student performance has been conducted. Goals, action plans and persons responsible have yet to be determined.

- The documents presented to the Fact Finding team include only the first steps toward a comprehensive School Improvement Plan. The school has yet to conduct a thorough analysis of all its sources of student performance data to identify fundamental root causes of student learning gaps.
- While groups around the school have independently reviewed data, in interviews and presentations, the administration confirmed that no other data beyond MCAS had been reviewed to date as part of the school improvement planning process and that no actions plans have been developed. The school's efforts have yet to provide a sufficient foundation to guide the identification of strategies likely to have a positive impact on student achievement by attacking root causes of their learning issues.

VIII. To date, there has not been sufficient analysis, monitoring and documentation to determine whether changes in the school's organization and operations are efficient and effective in the support of improved student achievement.

- The school has the following key organizational structures, personnel, and practices: Smaller Learning Communities, block scheduling, Instructional Leadership Team, chief academic officer, several program directors, assistant headmasters, math and literacy coaches, teacher leaders, a whole school change coach on loan from the district office, content area meetings, and common planning time in which teachers participate in both SLC and departmental meetings.
- Smaller Learning Communities are in the second year of implementation but the expected improvements in learning time and teaching practice have yet to be documented.

- The block schedule was introduced this year and feedback is limited to date on its impact on student and teacher motivation and attitude toward learning.
- Math and Literacy Coaches are working within some teacher's classrooms and meeting with a larger group of teachers. At present, there is no evaluation of the effectiveness of the support provided by the coaches.
- A meeting structure that includes content area meetings and SLC meetings on a regular basis is in place, but an assessment of the value of these meetings in improving teacher expertise has not yet been undertaken.

IX. A promising practice has been for school leaders to work with the literacy coach to develop a common understanding of best practices in Reader's and Writer's Workshops.

- Based on the team's interviews with administrators, discussion of best practices in the Workshop during administrative meetings has begun to create a common understanding of what administrators should look for in effective implementation of the workshop approach.

X. While the administration has articulated a process for regular education teachers to identify special education students and learn about their Individual Education Plans (IEPs), none of the regular education teachers interviewed reported having this information. This makes it unlikely that appropriate accommodations are being made for these students' learning needs to be met.

- While teachers receive class lists that indicates whether students have special learning needs, none of those interviewed were aware of the specifications of individual educational plans for their students.
- The special education director described being available for teacher questions but indicated few teachers sought out assistance, suggesting a gap in communication between regular education and special education staff.

XI. There is a tension between district mandated or strongly recommended practices and site based management and accountability for student progress.

- While the team found the district mandated strategies to be reasonable and representative of best practice, the fact that these approaches are generally mandated creates a situation in which accountability for school performance is in part dependent on district initiatives and in part on the successful implementation of those initiatives at the school level.
- Staff acceptance and commitment to new programs selected by the district is hampered in English High School by the fact that staff often feel that significant decisions on strategies are out of their hands. Staff beliefs about their own students' needs conflict with some district curriculum selections.
- The school and district lack a productive forum to explore and, to the extent possible, resolve this tension.

Fact Finding Review Process

Introduction and Purpose

The Fact Finding Review is the third stage in the process used to assess school performance under the Massachusetts School and District Accountability System. At the first stage of the process, school performance and improvement are assessed by the Massachusetts Department of Education (MDE) and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MDESE). The second stage of the process is the Fact Finding Review, which is a more in-depth evaluation of the school. The Fact Finding Review is a more in-depth evaluation of the school's performance and improvement efforts and is intended to be a more thorough review of the school's performance and improvement efforts.

The Fact Finding Review process is designed to be a more thorough review of the school's performance and improvement efforts. The Fact Finding Review is a more in-depth evaluation of the school's performance and improvement efforts and is intended to be a more thorough review of the school's performance and improvement efforts. The Fact Finding Review is a more in-depth evaluation of the school's performance and improvement efforts and is intended to be a more thorough review of the school's performance and improvement efforts.

The Fact Finding Review's charge is to advise the Commissioner of Education of the results of the review process, of their judgment of the school's performance, and of their judgment of the school's improvement plan.

- Does the school's improvement plan appear to be a sound plan for improving student performance?
- Do the conditions appear to be in place for successful implementation of the school's improvement plan?

If the answer to either or both of these questions is no, the Commissioner may declare the school to be under-performing.

Schools that are declared to be under-performing are referred to the third stage in the School and District Accountability System, the Fact Finding Review. The Fact Finding Review is an in-depth evaluation of the school's performance and improvement efforts.

- Does the school's improvement plan appear to be a sound plan for improving student performance?
- Do the conditions appear to be in place for successful implementation of the school's improvement plan?

The Fact Finding Review's charge is to advise the Commissioner and Board of Education of the results of the review process, of their judgment of the school's performance, and of their judgment of the school's improvement plan.

1. What are the gaps in student performance at the school which are reflected in the student performance data and in classroom observations?
2. What factors are contributing to the low student performance?
3. What are the prospects for improved student performance at the school and what should be done to ensure this improvement?

The Fact Finding Review is a key component of the Massachusetts Department of Education's (MDE) efforts to improve student performance. The Fact Finding Review is a key component of the Massachusetts Department of Education's (MDE) efforts to improve student performance. The Fact Finding Review is a key component of the Massachusetts Department of Education's (MDE) efforts to improve student performance.

Fact Finding Review Process

Introduction and Purpose

The Fact Finding Review is the third stage in the process used to assess school performance under the Massachusetts School and District Accountability System. At the first stage of the process, schools' performance and improvement on state MCAS tests is rated. Schools that perform in the lowest School Performance Rating categories (very high percentage of students with failing MCAS performance; low percentage proficient and advanced) may be referred for a Panel Review.

The Panel Review process constitutes the second stage of the School and District Accountability System. Panel Reviews are conducted to assist the Commissioner of Education in determining whether State intervention is needed to guide improvement efforts in schools where students' MCAS performance is critically low and no trend toward improved student performance is evident from MCAS data. Panels, consisting of 3-5 members, review data and written information on the school's performance and improvement efforts and spend two days visiting the school and meeting with school and district leaders.

The Review Panel's charge is to advise the Commissioner of Education, at the conclusion of the review process, of their judgment on two questions:

- Does the school under review appear to have a sound plan for improving student performance?
- Do the conditions appear to be in place for successful implementation of the school's improvement plan?

If the answer to either or both of these questions is no, the Commissioner may declare the school to be under-performing.

Schools that are declared to be under-performing are referred to the third stage in the School and District Accountability System, the Fact Finding Review. The Fact Finding Review is an in-depth evaluation of the school. The purposes of the Fact Finding Review are to:

- Provide an in-depth diagnosis of the school's strengths and areas for improvement
- Make specific recommendations for the development of the school's improvement plan

The Fact Finding Team's charge is to advise the Commissioner and Board of Education, at the conclusion of the review process, of their judgment on three key questions:

1. What are the gaps in student performance at this school which are evidenced in the student performance data and in classroom observations?
2. What factors are contributing to the low levels of student performance?
3. What are the prospects for improved student performance at the school and what should be done to ensure this improvement?

The Fact Finding Team answers the key questions based on evidence collected through observations of teaching and learning, interviews of faculty, students, parents, administrators, district personnel and other school stakeholders and through the review of documents, including

the school improvement plan, student assessment information, curriculum documents, and student work. The team's judgments must be robust and fully supported by evidence.

The Fact Finding Team's judgments are guided by a protocol which requires the team to respond to the key questions in each of the following areas of inquiry: curriculum; instruction and learning; professional development; leadership and planning; organizational management; programs and services for students; and district support. The Fact Finding Team uses its professional judgment to focus on areas of inquiry that reveal key strengths and areas for improvement in the school.

The English High School Profile

The English High School is a Grade 9-12 comprehensive high school that enrolled 1291 students in 2001. The school identified 8% of its students as White, 39% as Hispanic, 51% as African American, and 2% as Asian. The school reported that 71% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and English is not the First Language for over one-half of the student body (53%). In 2001, 38% of students were identified as Limited English Proficient (LEP) and 17% of students received Special Education Services. The English High School has a School-Wide Title I Program.

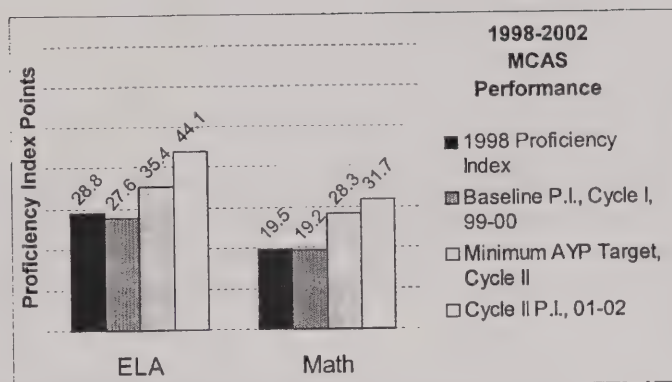
Total enrollment figures as well as the distribution of student populations have remained relatively stable over the last three years with the exception of a 20% increase in the percentage of low income students, which increased from 51% to 71%. In 2000 (the most recent attendance data available to the panel), the English High School's daily attendance rate was 85.8 percent with students missing an average of 25.6 days of school. The state average is 11-12 days per school year.

The three-year retention rate at The English High School is 13.1%. In 2000, 183 students were retained with slightly over one-half (93) of the students retained being 9th graders. The 2000 retention rate at The English was over twice the district retention rate (6.1%) and five times the state retention rate. The dropout rate (10.0) has held relatively steady since the 95-96 school year.

Out-of-school suspensions at The English High School have been increasing since 1998, going up from 7.4% to 19.0% in 2000 with 231 students receiving one or more out-of-school suspensions. The 2000 OSS rate at English HS was more than five times the district percentage (3.7%). The exclusion rate has increased from 5.4% in 1998 to 9.9% in 2000. Exclusion rates represent instances of exclusion per 1000 students enrolled. Twelve students were excluded from The English High School in 2000.

MCAS Results

In Cycle II, the school received a performance ratings of “Very Low” in English language arts and “Critically Low” in mathematics. The school’s Cycle II improvement rating was “Above Target” in ELA and “On Target” in mathematics. In Cycle I, the school’s performance rating was “Critically Low” in both ELA and mathematics. The school meet its Cycle I improvement target in ELA but failed to meet it in mathematics.



Grade 10 MCAS results in English/Language Arts from 1998-2001 saw a decline in the number of 10th graders in the Failing performance level to 43% from the 1998 baseline of 82%. Over the four years, the number of students in the Proficient/Advanced levels increased from 1-9%. The 2001 failure rate for The English HS 10th graders was significantly higher than the district percentage and over twice the state percentage of grade 10 students scoring in the Failing level in ELA. The district and state failure rates were 56% and 18% respectively.

MCAS results in Mathematics showed a decline in failure rates during Cycle I. Scores remained relatively stable from 1998 to 2000, decreasing from 75% to 66% of 10th graders failing. The failure rate declined in 2001 to 47%. Over the four-year period, the number of students at Proficient/Advanced levels increased from 1-12%. A comparison of school and district figures reveals that The English High School’s failure rates in Mathematics are well above district percentages. While approximately one-half of English HS students scored at the failing level, the 2001 state percentage of students failing the grade 10 MCAS in Math was 25% or one out of four students.

Despite decreases in failure rates in ELA and Mathematics, significant achievement gaps in MCAS scores remain evident for several student sub-groups at The English High School. In 2001, the failure rates for male students were 20% above female students in ELA and approximately 10% above females in Mathematics. Special Education students’ failure rates were 88% in ELA and 97% in Mathematics. Sixty-five percent of Hispanic students tested in 2001 scored in the Failing performance level in both ELA and Mathematics; African-American students’ failure rates were 60% in ELA and 76% in Mathematics. The failure rates for White students were 25% and 38% in ELA and Mathematics respectively.

Key Areas of Inquiry

I. Curriculum

The Fact Finding Review Team determined that curriculum factors with the greatest impact on student achievement at The English High School include (a) district mandates concerning the *intended curriculum*; (b) lack of consistent monitoring and analysis of the *taught curriculum*; and (c) lack of a systematic means of gathering student achievement data to monitor the *attained curriculum*.

Direction for the school's *intended curriculum* comes from the central office of the Boston Public Schools, which periodically introduces new curriculum and instructional materials. These recommendations include the organization of the school and the daily schedule in which the curriculum should be taught. Based on a report for the Carnegie Foundation, the district mandated that Boston's secondary schools restructure into Smaller Learning Communities (SLC) or independent 'schools within a school.' The English High School chose to organize into four Smaller Learning Communities (First Year Academy for ninth graders, Global Studies, Media and Arts, and Finance and Technology), each of which is supervised by an administrator who also has responsibility for evaluating teachers. A guidance counselor is assigned to each SLC, and each has its own signature school-to-career courses. This restructuring, was first put in place during 2001-2002 and was augmented this year with block scheduling, also strongly suggested by the central office and then approved by a vote of the teachers at English High School.

The Boston Public School's *intended curriculum* is based on citywide Learning Standards for English language arts and mathematics, as well as for other subjects, that are aligned with the *Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks*. The instructional materials selected to implement the learning standards at the district and the school levels include Reader's and Writer's Workshop, *Math Connections* and *Glencoe Math*. There are pacing guides for *Math Connections* which identify the sequence and expectations for pacing of the program by teachers. In summary, the school's curriculum is determined by district mandates, which include approaches that are reasonable and reflective of high standards.

To oversee the curriculum, the school has a number of personnel with designated responsibility for curricular issues. The chief academic officer at The English High School is responsible for all curriculum, teaching, learning, and numerous other duties. A director for mathematics and science is responsible for overseeing implementation of the math program. The school also has a district math coach who is at the school 2.5 days per week. This year, the math coach is working directly with only five teachers, representing approximately 25% of the math teachers in the building. She also has contact with a much larger group through content area meetings. Through meetings and class visits, the director of mathematics and science is in contact with all math teachers. The school also has a full time literacy coach who works directly with some teachers in their classrooms, meets with a wider range of teachers, helps the chief academic officer to set department agendas, and provides training to the administration on the workshop approach.

Supports for implementing the district curriculum includes professional development that has been required for all math and ELA teachers in *Math Connections* and *Reader's and Writer's*

Workshop. Teachers also have two to three periods per week for common planning time. Although some administrators reported that teachers have been given common templates for lesson delivery in the new block schedule, implementation of a recommended lesson format for block schedule was not seen in the majority of classes visited by the Fact Finding Review Team.

While the *intended curriculum* is supported by the standards, programs, personnel and professional development described above, the school has not systematically collected data about the extent to which the *taught curriculum* aligns with the *intended curriculum*. In general, supports provided by both the school and the district are not yet coordinated with monitoring to ensure that required practices transfer consistently to the classroom. Literacy and math coaches, visits by supervisory staff and common planning time meeting structures are in place, but these systems lack a common way to collect and analyze data about the extent to which the intended curriculum is being implemented. While all but a few of the 25 teachers interviewed reported someone visiting their classes, many reported not receiving feedback on their implementation of the mathematics and ELA programs. Coaches and the math and science director report that they do not have standardized tools that collect data on implementation that can inform their understanding of whether programs and practices are supporting student learning. The prospects for improved curricular implementation are limited without more systematic monitoring of the degree and quality of current implementation.

A third factor within the area of curriculum that the Fact Finding team determined to have an impact on student achievement is the limited use of student assessment data to assess the *attained curriculum*, or what is actually learned by students. Although teachers regularly administer quizzes, tests, Boston Public Schools mid-term and final examinations, and informal assessments, the only measure calibrated to state and local standards that is actually used for analysis is the MCAS. (Student grades cannot be used effectively because teachers determine the components of a grade individually according to teacher and administration interviews.) The school has only looked at MCAS data and does not have other student assessment data in a systematic form that allows for analysis. While small groups look at SRI, math tasks and writing prompts among other measures, to date the school has not examined the additional performance information to identify additional areas of student weakness on a school-wide basis as part of developing its improvement plan. Without looking carefully at trends and patterns that appear in student scores on sources such as BPS tests, Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) data, City Task data, and writing prompts, the school may not make accurate determinations about areas of greatest need.

Prospects for improvement in the effective implementation of the school's academic programs are likely to increase if the school is able to establish systems to better monitor the implementation of its curriculum and its effect on student learning. Without these data, the school is not able to assess on a frequent basis its fidelity to the intended programs or how well those programs are working for students.

II. Instruction and Learning

Key aspects of instruction and learning that have contributed to low achievement levels at The English High School are (a) inconsistent implementation of the Boston Public Schools teacher evaluation procedure; (b) inconsistent examination of instructional practice (c) low expectations for student achievement; (d) limited variety of instructional strategies.

Both the headmaster and chief academic officer indicated in interviews that in recent years, the school has not followed the required BPS staff evaluation procedure, which would help to ensure effective teaching practice. However, this year the headmaster has put forth an aggressive staff evaluation schedule which, if implemented as planned and according to the city protocol, will promote good instruction.

Some formative feedback on instructional practices is taking place. Examination of instructional practice sometimes occurs during common planning time (CPT) within each Small Learning Community. However, according to teacher interviews and in accordance with policy, much CPT is devoted either to disseminating information and planning special events, exchanging instructional materials, or discussing problems of students. Regular and consistent review and discussion of student work, one of the district mandates for CPT, is not happening on a wide scale, a fact recognized as a problem in one of the school's past Whole School Improvement Planning documents.

Coaches are another source of formative feedback on instructional practice; however coaches are able to visit less than half of the classes. For instance, the math coach works with about 25% of the math teachers. Some of these teachers have been directed to work with the coach and others have sought assistance independently. The school schedule is also a major factor in determining who can work with the math coach. The literacy coach, who is in her second year at the school, estimates that she has been in about 30% of the English classrooms. Through meetings and working with the chief academic officer, she has a much broader contact with English language arts teachers.

In mathematics, the math and science director is yet another source of formative feedback on instruction. Both the director and teachers report that he meets regularly with math teachers to discuss the curriculum, check pacing charts, and provide supplementary resources, such as websites and materials. He is also frequently in classes.

The final existing source of feedback on instruction is the administration, including the headmaster, chief academic officer, and assistant headmasters in charge of each SLC. According to teacher interviews, assistant headmasters are in classes for short periods of time (usually 2-10 minutes) unless they are conducting a formal observation. Based on interviews with teachers, while there are frequent short administrator visits to classrooms, there is no consistent pattern of documenting these visits or providing feedback to the faculty members.

As described above, common planning time, coaches, content area directors and administrators are all sources for feedback on instruction. However these resources are not coordinated and feedback does not always offer a consistent perspective on effective instruction. There is no

shared articulation among the many support personnel of what to look for in math and ELA classes. Some written feedback is limited by contractual agreement, but this does not prevent the school from documenting instruction for general planning purposes. Specifically, administrators do not document if teachers are implementing the curriculum, methods, and ideas they have been taught in professional development sessions. No clear process has been formulated for collecting common data. In interviews, the school's leaders also identified monitoring as an area for improvement in their own practice.

A recent promising strategy has been for school leaders to work with the literacy coach to develop a common understanding of best practices in *Reader's* and *Writer's Workshops* to determine the extent of transfer of new skills into everyday classroom practices. There would appear to be a good prospect for improvement in ELA observation if this monitoring were used to offer meaningful feedback to teachers and insightful data for program planning.

In addition to gathering information about the monitoring of instruction, the expanded Fact Finding Review Team collected a great deal of on-site data through classroom observation during two days of the visit. In all, 67 classes (mainly ELA and math) were observed. As noted above the school is in the process of adopting longer instructional blocks and adjusting teaching accordingly. The Fact Finding Team's data suggest that the school is in the early stages of this transition.

In 32 of the classes observed, objectives or agendas were clearly posted or evident. Most classes showed continuity of instruction between what had apparently occurred on the previous day and the present day. Use of the *Math Connections* textbook was seen in only eight of 25 math classes observed.

Within classes, the discipline code was not consistently enforced by all teachers, and there were different behavior expectations across classrooms. Discipline in class appeared to be related to the level of teaching and challenge of the content being taught. In classes that were observed to be flat and uninteresting, students were much more likely to act up and in some cases place their head down on the desk or not pay attention. The Team did not observe consistent expectations for submission of homework, dealing with tardiness to classes, or class participation.

Many lessons are not taught with sufficiently high academic expectations. Expectations were judged by the observers on the Fact Finding Review Team to be at an acceptable level in only about 50% of the classes observed. Although teachers had knowledge of their content, for the most part questions posed to students involved simple recall, were not probing or challenging and did not call upon students to use critical thinking skills. It was the impression of Team members that the ability of the students often exceeded the level of instruction and teachers often missed opportunities to raise the bar of instruction. Homework assigned was not always connected with the work in class and in some cases did not seem sufficient to give students needed practice or reinforcement. Some classes started late. There were no obvious consequences for students who arrived late to classes, did not participate in class, or did not complete the homework, which further supports the judgment of low academic expectations.

In the aggregate, teaching methods do not vary sufficiently to maintain student engagement for the extended block periods. The dominant teaching methodology observed in over 50% of the 67 classes visited was teacher-directed whole group instruction involving either question and answer and student recitation or students reading material from texts or worksheets. The second most dominant behavior was students working independently, often on worksheets, which was seen in 32 classes. As noted previously, assessment practices were not varied and most questions were recall questions. Other behaviors observed included teacher modeling in nine classes; cooperative learning groups in six instances; journal-writing in ELA (regular and ESL) in ten instances; six student presentations in both math and ELA classes; and teachers monitoring and checking for understanding through recall and or probing questions in 32 classes. Small group instruction was seen in 22 instances and teacher and student dialogues took place in ten classes. The use of technology including audiotapes, computers or graphing calculators took place during 18 of the classes observed. The team concluded that, while challenging, excellent instruction was occurring in some instances, the majority of classes were not expanding student learning opportunities through good use of methodology.

The availability of instructional materials varied across the school. Most teachers appear to have sufficient texts, although not necessarily an abundance of corresponding and enhancing supplementary materials. Some teachers are making and using their own instructional materials. This was reported by teachers of ESL and some electives (film, dance, etc.) and also observed in special education classes. Math teachers are providing supplementary materials or making materials to augment *Math Connections* which, they feel, does not provide sufficient practice exercises. Teachers described, and the team observed, significant resistance to *Math Connections*. In some math classes, only a few graphing calculators were in working order. Books for *Reader's* and *Writer's Workshop* had not yet arrived at school by the time of the Fact Finding Review, requiring ELA teachers to provide some of their own materials. The principal reported that all other necessary materials are on order.

Based on the instructional profile described above, it was the judgment of the reviewers that teachers at The English High School need further professional development in structuring the 80-minute teaching block to ensure good pacing, to challenge students, and to provide opportunities for students to participate in several different types of activities during the extended class period. The prospects for improved instruction would also increase if there were consistently high expectations in all classes. There is also a need for more systematic collection of data about classroom practices to identify areas of strength and areas needing improvement. The coaches, program directors and administrators need to develop a common understanding of desired practice and common ways of collecting data about actual practice.

III. Professional Development

In the area of professional development, the Fact Finding Review Team at The English High School determined that factors that influence student achievement include (a) implementation of professional development is not monitored; (b) professional development is not targeted to showing teachers how to fill gaps in student achievement as determined by student assessment; (c) common planning time is not consistently used to look at student work and monitor instruction; and (d) key professional development initiatives are not impacting all teachers.

Teachers participate in professional development programs and activities that are generally designed to raise student achievement or to support change initiatives. Prior to implementation of the block schedule, teachers attended 1.5 days of professional development at the end of last year. A voluntary workshop was also scheduled during the summer that attracted 70 teachers. One problem at the school, however, is that implementation of the block schedule is not being monitored for consistent quality across the curriculum. Some teachers reported that they had been provided with block schedule lesson plan templates for ensuring maximum utilization of time during these new class periods. The principal also reported that faculty had received written guidance on how to plan for the block schedule. In observations, however, good utilization of the extended instructional time was not uniformly evident.

In the area of mathematics, all math teachers meet in small groups (depending on when they are not teaching classes) for 40 minutes weekly with the director of math and science. According to the school's documents, and as confirmed by the program director and teachers, topics at these meetings include MCAS responses to open response and short answer questions, writing in mathematics, teaching techniques, sharing materials, and sharing with colleagues what strategies worked. Due to scheduling issues, teachers teaching the same math class and level are not necessarily grouped together. The school's part time math coach also works individually with five math teachers and joins the weekly meetings on Mondays. The math director also plans to have math teachers visit each other's classes as a way to share best practice.

While these efforts are effective for those teachers most involved, it was not clear to the team how the limited number of teachers working with the coach would have a positive effect throughout the school. At the same time, the principal indicated that spreading the coach over too many teachers would not be effective. Additional coaching time at the school is one possible solution. The school could also examine better coordination of the coach, director of math and science and assistant headmasters. At present, the coach and director of math and science are not training assistant headmasters in what they should look for in effective math instruction. If these positions shared a common understanding of what to look for and shared common tools for gathering data in math classes, the school might be able to better monitor the effectiveness of its mathematics program. The administrative professional development plan calls for work with the citywide math coordinator in 2003. This will certainly assist in developing a common lens for reviewing mathematics. Better monitoring might allow the school to determine, based on data, the professional development priorities in mathematics and better communicate with the faculty in SLC and other meetings a common vision for math instruction.

Similar to the math teachers, all English language arts (ELA) teachers meet weekly in small groups during common planning time with the school's full time literacy coach. According to the school's documents, they focus on reading strategies and planning for implementation of the *Reader's and Writer's Workshop* in their classes. ELA teachers have also been noting students' MCAS scores in ELA and are beginning to analyze MCAS data. One ELA teacher who has a demonstration *Reader's and Writer's Workshop* classroom, also works with several other ELA teachers to help them implement this teaching program. During this fall, the literacy coach has been meeting with the headmaster and assistant headmasters to discuss best practices in the *Reader's and Writer's Workshop* approach. The team found this to be a promising practice although it has yet to lead to the creation of common tools for assessing the quality of instruction in the workshop method.

For 40 minutes each week, all teachers meet in small groups of mixed area content teachers from their Small Learning Communities along with their SLC leader. These meetings include reviewing concerns about students, planning for community building activities for the SLC, signature course development for the SLC and sharing of curriculum ideas. Every month, on release afternoons, teachers meet for two hours alternately either with their content area department or with their SLC to further explore curriculum, instruction and assessment topics. These regular meetings offer a means through which a coordinated process of instructional improvement could be implemented.

The BPS requires an additional six hours of after school or Saturday professional development for each teacher that may consist of math and ELA sessions related to implementation of the curriculum as well as other topics. Teachers are asked to submit a copy of their professional development plans for administrative review and approval. Many teachers are still working toward certification or advanced degrees and are involved in college courses. Some engage in workshops sponsored by professional organizations. Although the evidence indicates that the faculty is engaged in furthering their education, it is not clear how this is strategically linked to identified student needs.

The school is making plans to implement a Collaborative Coaching and Learning model in January 2003. This intervention will enable teachers to observe each other and provide feedback regarding teaching.

Prospects for improvement in the area of better instruction that more closely meets student needs would be increased if assessment results were more carefully analyzed, and professional development was targeted to those results. In addition there are no ELA and math specific rubrics for administrators to determine school-wide progress on teacher implementation and to identify additional professional development needs. There is also little monitoring of the effect of previous professional development on teachers' classroom practices. Examples are *Teaching for Understanding* and *Literacy Across the Curriculum*, which have not continued as expected, according to one of the school's SIP planning documents. Observations conducted by the team showed very limited evidence of these practices.

IV. Leadership and Planning

Factors in the area of leadership and planning that may be linked to the performance of students at The English High School include (a) the short term need for the development and implementation of an improvement plan that is tied to data on student achievement and school practices; (b) the further articulation of a vision and belief system that students can achieve at higher levels; (c) the long term need for an ongoing process in the school whereby teachers and administrators regularly review/analyze and utilize student performance data and data about the school's practices.

The English High School does not yet have a clear, credible and academically sound improvement plan that is based on a detailed analysis of student performance data. While parts of a plan exist both as a result of the BPS (spring 2002) and PIMS (fall 2002) planning processes, a full plan has not yet been developed that has a broad base of faculty support. The school recognizes that it needs to look more thoroughly at student performance data and connect that data to data on its practices. The headmaster, chief academic officer and a small set of teachers are the most involved in the planning process. An action plan with objectives, strategies, benchmarks, timelines, persons responsible and evaluation, that has the support of the entire faculty, needs to be developed to increase the prospects for improved student achievement.

School leaders can discuss key issues anecdotally but cannot provide clear analysis of student data and practice to prove their impressions of student needs. Multiple data sources have not been accessed and analyzed. Although The PIM (Performance Improvement Mapping) Process provided some urgency for the school to use student data as a means to examine instructional decisions and the curriculum, this process was not complete at the time of the Fact Finding Review. The school, in its status report of November 12, 2002, acknowledged that there is a data gap at the school and that there is weakness in the gathering and analysis of formative data. At the time of the Fact Finding Review, a complete data analysis process to follow through on the DOE PIMS documents was only partially accomplished.

While many individual express a vision of a high quality academic program, teachers and administrators revealed in their interviews that the school lacks a shared belief system that all students can learn and achieve at higher levels and that instruction directly impacts student achievement. A common vision is not posted, regularly voiced or embedded in school improvement activities. Although a mission statement appears in the *Student Agenda*, one leader expressed the need for development of a shared vision that would be developed and owned by all stakeholders, including students and teachers.

In addition to the urgent need for a school improvement plan, the school needs to establish an ongoing process to review student performance data. The group working on the improvement plan has just begun taking a systematic analytical look at its student assessment data but has not analyzed and shared it with staff, except for MCAS scores, as the beginning of informing instructional strategies or determining root causes of low achievement. Some members of subject area departments and SLCs report that they have occasionally looked at student work or conducted joint lesson planning during common planning time. They have used this data to inform instruction in certain areas, such as providing training to students on answering open

response questions on the mathematics portion of the MCAS; however, these are not common or consistent practices.

In terms of the prospect for improvement in this area, the team believes that the school's leaders are capable of developing and sustaining an effective, problem-solving approach to improvement planning in the school; however, they have not yet completed exact, written plans for doing so.

V. Organizational Management

The Fact Finding Review Team noted recent promising practices in organizational change that include (a) Smaller Learning Communities; (b) block scheduling; (c) common planning time; and (d) the Instructional Leadership Team.

The school has instituted organizational structures and practices that may result in efficient and effective operation and support improved student achievement. These structures include the Smaller Learning Communities (now in the second year), block scheduling (just begun this year), and common planning time. The three assistant headmasters and bilingual director have each been assigned to head one of the four SLCs.

In general, the Smaller Learning Communities (SLC), now in the second year of implementation, appear to increase emotional safety for students and have the potential for greater individualization of programming for students. In terms of physical safety, there is a police presence in hallways and stairwells, as well as teacher and administrator presence when students are changing classes, which for the most part was orderly. The building seems secure.

The block scheduling, introduced this school year, reduces the number of class changes and passing in hallways. This form of scheduling also decreases the number of students each teacher works with. Teachers report that they are getting to know students better with this schedule and that the SLC structure also leads to greater personalization for students.

Other structures that show promise are the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) and the Teacher Leadership Team, a sub-group of the ILT. Advisory periods and collaborative coaching and learning, generally considered to be best practices, are proposed for the near future. As indicated in sections above, the structural changes have also resulted in common planning time that brings teachers together across subjects (in SLC CPT meetings) and in subjects across grades (during subject area CPT). The response of staff and students to the recent changes in school structure and scheduling have been positive although no formal surveys or other assessments have been undertaken to assess the academic impact of these changes.

In terms of policies, the Fact Finding Review Team found that the school has no consistent grading policy with regard to proportion of grades assigned to class work, homework, tests, quizzes, projects, etc. Therefore the school cannot look at teacher assessment to understand the progress of its students. Although the school as a whole has a policy regarding attendance and tardiness at the start of the day, there are no consistent tardiness policies regarding student arrival at individual classes.

In general, a more collaborative working culture in the school appears to have resulted from the implementation of SLCs, block scheduling, content area meetings, common planning time and an Instructional Leadership Team composed of both teachers and administrators. However, school leaders have yet to effectively use these structures to collect data for improvement planning and to regularly communicate clear priorities for instruction.

VI. Programs and Services for Students

The Fact Finding Review Team noted that services to students may impact student achievement in that (a) they are not sufficiently individualized because most instruction is “whole class”; (b) the accommodations needed of special education students are not communicated to their regular education teachers.

At The English High School there are a number of programs and services for students in the area of academics. This includes AP and honors classes, academic support for MCAS, special education services, Somali and Spanish bilingual programs, and ESL instruction. Within classes for these special populations, however, “whole class” teaching is still the norm and there is little individualization or differentiation of instruction. Even MCAS review classes receive whole class instruction. One MCAS review class was noted as having approximately 30 students – within the limits of BPS class size guidelines but deemed by members of the team to be too large for a remedial program.

The school has made provisions for students who have yet to pass MCAS. Every student that failed MCAS has an MCAS Improvement Plan and some of the students are using TEST-U online (an MCAS prep online computer program) in their classes. MCAS help is available after school on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, from 2-4 PM. There have also been MCAS sessions scheduled on Saturday mornings from 9-12 noon to prepare students for the December retest. Parents of the 136 seniors who did not pass the MCAS have been contacted by mail and/or by phone by the school’s parent center to inform them of the supports available for their children. There is no before school tutoring program but the headmaster reports that a number of teachers meet with students informally to help them prepare for the MCAS or to provide other assistance. A number of teachers interviewed indicated that they stay after school one or more afternoons each week to provide individual assistance to students as needed. The English High School participates in the GEAR UP program in which college students provide in-class assistance to at risk students. Summer school and evening classes are available for students to make up classes that they fail in order to be able to graduate. These supports have the potential to improve student achievement, however, many students who could benefit from service do not attend due to after school work and family responsibilities or lack of interest.

After the second marking period, students who are failing courses are sent letters indicating that they are in danger of not being promoted. Their parents are contacted and meetings are set up the student, parent, the administrator of the SLC, and their guidance counselor to implement a monitoring system for support, attendance, and teacher feedback. The monitoring continues until the end of the year. Some members of the team felt that home notification would be more effective if it were made after the first making period.

Although class lists generally do have an indication of whether or not students are designated as special needs, teachers interviewed said that they do not know which students participating in regular education classrooms have IEPs. The team concluded that if teachers have not read education plans, they cannot know individual students' needs and what accommodations or adjustments to make in their instruction to meet those needs.

VII. District Support

The Fact Finding Review Team could not come to clear agreement on the impact of district support on student achievement at The English High School. The Team did agree that there is a tension between district mandated or strongly recommended practices and site based management and accountability for student progress. Questions that were considered without reaching corporate judgment were: (a) Is the district's aggressive change agenda sufficiently funded? (b) Do the district's mandates confound a data driven improvement process?

District recommendations include curriculum (*Math Connections/Glencoe Math* and *Reader's and Writer's Workshop*), professional development, the whole school improvement planning process (WSIP), SLCs, block scheduling, coaching, collaborative coaching and learning, common planning time, *Literacy Across the Curriculum*, and *Looking At Student Work*. While these systems and approaches are reasonable, rational and recognized best practices, the fact that they are generally mandated creates a situation in which accountability for school performance is in part dependent on district initiatives and in part on the successful implementation of those initiatives at the school level. Key to successful implementation is staff buy-in, which ironically is less likely when reform is initiated from outside the school. This tension is clearly at play within The English High School. Most prominently, the *Math Connections* curriculum has not been enthusiastically received due to staff beliefs about what math instruction most suits the needs of students at the school. While this tension is not unusual to find, the school and district lack a productive forum to explore and, to the extent possible, resolve this tension.

There has been an aggressive change schedule at The English High School. Many changes including the moves to Smaller Learning Communities and block scheduling have occurred in a short period of time with no plans for systematic collection of data to determine the impact of the changes. Some of the recommended or mandated innovations may not have sufficient staffing to allow for optimal implementation. For example, although the district has provided a math coach to help direct the adoption of the *Math Connections* curriculum, the coach is on site only 2.5 days per week and is only able to work with five teachers at present. The school's bilingual program director was put in charge of the Global Studies Learning Community, and, although many of the school's bilingual students are in this SLC, the task of administering the SLC takes time away from the needs of the bilingual program as a whole.

The team concluded that the school's chief academic officer does not have sufficient human resources to address all of her responsibilities in the areas of curriculum, instruction and assessment as well as other duties including grant writing, MCAS administration, and deployment of substitute teachers. In terms of resources, teachers have not yet received materials

for *Reader's and Writer's Workshop* which is now the mandated ELA curriculum. As mentioned in other sections of this report, existing resources could be better used. However the team was not able to conclude whether or not even the most efficient use of existing resources would be enough to support changes in instruction at the required pace for school improvement.

While Boston's high school reform agenda is clear, rational and based on best practices, the mandating of strategies for improvement has a perverse effect on the incentives to analyze data for improvement efforts. Because faculty generally feels that the district will make curricular and instructional decisions, the analysis of data to determine improvement strategies can be seen as an empty exercise. The perception is that, in the end, the strategies will come from the district. The team did not find that the district's strategy was wrong due to this issue. To the contrary, many district initiatives are proving beneficial, and the district's improvement planning process focuses schools on data. The issue is clarifying for schools how they are empowered to make data driven decisions within the parameters of the district's change agenda. Such a clarification might help the school to use data to better implement and, as allowed, modify reform efforts.

Conclusion

A few themes emerge from the Fact Finding Review of the programs and practices at The English High School. First, the absence of systematic data collection and use to monitor curriculum implementation, instructional practices, and student achievement beyond MCAS scores is a major impediment to continued success. The school is expending huge effort on many fronts, but without monitoring, the effectiveness of its effort is unknown and the school cannot prioritize, adjust and refine its initiatives based on an understanding of actual student learning changes. Secondly, the fact finding team's instructional profile and interview data indicate that while there are examples of excellent instruction in the school, low expectations are evident in many classes and most teachers are in the early stages of adjusting instruction to the demands of a block schedule. Thirdly, at the time of the fact finding review, there was no improvement plan in place that used multiple sources of data to address student and staff needs with clear goals, benchmarks, and assessments of progress. In the opinion of the fact finding team, a more strategic, data driven approach would maximize the considerable efforts being made by teachers and administrators within the school on behalf of their students.

